

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9199

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 11938

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: ON THE EVE OF
THE SECOND ROUND

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REFERENCE: PARIS 11797 NOTAL

1. SUMMARY. AS CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO CLOSE, LATEST IFOP AND SOFRES POLLS CALL ELECTION DEAD EVEN: 50 PERCENT FOR EACH CANDIDATE, BUT WITH 12-13 PERCENT STILL UNDECIDED. CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN SHARPLY AND IN GENERAL CLEANLY FOUGHT. ITS TONE HAS BECOME MORE TRUCULENT IN LAST DAYS, HOWEVER, AS BOTH GISCARD AND MITTERRAND HAVE GONE ON THE ATTACK. CANDIDATES HAVE CONCENTRATED ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES, WITH FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES PLAYING MINOR ROLE. CHABAN'S FIRST-ROUND VOTERS COULD DECIDE THE OUTCOME. LARGELY UNPREDICTABLE OVERSEAS VOTE (2 PERCENT) COULD ALSO TIP THE BALANCE. IF ELECTION IS DECIDED BY RAZOR-THIN MARGIN, WINNER WILL FACE DIFFICULT TASK OF TRYING TO UNIFY A SHARPLY DIVIDED FRANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. AS THE CANDIDATES MOVE DOWN THE HOME STRETCH, THEY HAVE BECOME RELUCTANT TO BREAK NEW GROUND. THE FINAL DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN HAVE PRODUCED NO SURPRISES IN THE ELABORATION OF THEIR POSITIONS. BREAD-AND-BUTTER ISSUES HAVE PREDOMINATED. CANDIDATES' PERSONALITIES, SHARPENED BY THE MAY 10 TELEVISION DEBATE, HAVE TAKEN ON MORE IMPORTANCE, PARTICULARLY SINCE BOTH GISCARD AND MITTERRAND HAVE TRIED HARD TO AVOID BEING TOO CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH A SINGLE PARTY (ALTHOUGH EACH HAS MADE THIS CHARGE AGAINST THE OTHER). THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE FIRST IN FRANCE TO USE THE FULL PANOPLY OF US ELECTIONEERING TECHNIQUES. BOTH CANDIDATES HAVE COME ACROSS WELL ON TELEVISION; MITTERRAND CANCELLED ONE PERSONAL APPEARANCE TO BE SURE OF MEETING A TELEVISION COMMITMENT.

3. CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN CURIOUSLY NON-IDEOLOGICAL, AND EACH CANDIDATE HAS MIRRORED THE OTHER TO A LARGE EXTENT. THUS GISCARD CHOSE THE THEME OF CHANGE WITHOUT RISK, WHILE MITTERRAND CAME OUT FOR CHANGE AND A MORE JUST SOCIETY. BOTH HAVE STRESSED IMPROVED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS WHICH WOULD STRENGTHEN FRANCE; FOREIGN POLICY HAS BEEN DOWNPLAYED. BOTH PITCHED THEIR CONFIDENTIAL

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CAMPAIGN TO A POPULATION WHICH HAS CLEARLY EXPRESSED ITS DESIRE FOR CHANGE. EACH SUGGESTED THAT HE COULD PROVIDE THIS CHANGE WHILE AVOIDING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL UPHEAVAL AND OFFERING A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL. THERE HAVE BEEN REMARKABLY FEW PERSONAL ATTACKS, AND THESE HAVE BEEN MADE MOSTLY NOT BY THE CANDIDATES THEMSELVES, BUT BY THEIR SUPPORTERS. THE CAMPAIGN'S LAST DAYS, HOWEVER, HAVE SEEN A CERTAIN HARSHNESS OF TONE DEVELOP IN EACH

CANDIDATE'S CRITICISM OF THE OTHER.

4. GISCARD AND HIS STRATEGISTS HAVE STUDIED THE 1960 KENNEDY CAMPAIGN CAREFULLY. THEY HAVE BORROWED ITS THEMES AND STYLE TO GOOD EFFECT, IMPROVING GISCARD'S IMAGE AS THE YOUTHFUL AND VIGOROUS CONTENDER AND FIFTH REPUBLIC TECHNOCRAT, CONTRASTING WITH MITTERRAND AS A FOURTH REPUBLIC FIGURE AND MEMBER OF AN OLDER GENERATION. GISCARD HAS ALSO DELIBERATELY COURTED THE WOMEN'S VOTE, WHERE THE POLLS SHOW HIM ALREADY ENJOYING THEIR SUPPORT BY A 4 TO 10 PERCENT MARGIN OVER MITTERRAND. GISCARD HAS CONTINUED TO STRESS SOCIAL ISSUES AND HAS REFRAINED

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FROM OVERLY ANTI-COMMUNIST REMARKS, LETTING OTHERS SUCH AS MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PONIATOWSKI PLAY THAT PARTICULAR THEME. AS THE SECOND-ROUND CAMPAIGN BEGAN, MITTERRAND WAS MAINTAINING HIS STATESMANLIKE, PROFESSIONAL
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SORIAL CALM AND PROJECTING AN IMAGE BETTER SUITED TO A MAN ALREADY IN OFFICE THAN TO THE OPPOSITION LEADER. IN HIS MOST RECENT APPEARANCES, HOWEVER, MITTERRAND HAS MARKEDLY CHANGED HIS STYLE AND HAS MOVED DECISIVELY TO THE ATTACK. HE APPARENTLY JUDGES IT MORE CRUCIAL AS THE CAMPAIGN CLOSES TO MOBILIZE EVERY BIT OF HIS LEFT SUPPORT -- IN AN EFFORT TO MOBILIZE BANDWAGON OF THE MASSES -- THAN TO MAKE FURTHER OVERTURES TO THE CENTER. THUS HE HAS LABELLED GISCARD AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GAULLIST FIFTH REPUBLIC, WHILE HAMMERING ON THE IMAGE OF GISCARD THE "RIGHTIST."

5. TELEVISION DEBATE. THE CANDIDATES' TELEVISION DEBATE MAY 10 MARKED THE HIGH POINT IN THE CAMPAIGN. WATCHED BY NEARLY HALF THE FRENCH POPULATION, THE DEBATE WAS PLAYED UP IN THE MEDIA AND WIDELY COMPARED TO THE 1960 KENNEDY-NIXON ENCOUNTERS. POLLS GAVE GISCARD AN EDGE, ALTHOUGH BOTH CANDIDATES ACQUITTED THEMSELVES WELL. GISCARD WAS THE MORE AGGRESSIVE AND Surer WITH HIS FIGURES AS HE TRIED TO PORTRAY MITTERRAND AS A MAN OF THE PAST. MITTERRAND ATTACKED GISCARD'S HANDLING OF THE ECONOMY AND WAS EFFECTIVE IN TRYING TO PUT TO REST FEARS OF THE LEFT PROGRAM, ESPECIALLY ITS PROVISIONS FOR NATIONALIZING KEY INDUSTRIES, BY EXPLAINING THAT NATIONALIZATIONS HAVE A LEGITIMATE PLACE IN FRANCE, AS STATED IN THE CONSTITUTION. THERE WAS ALMOST NO MENTION OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. BOTH MEN WERE VAGUE ON FRANCE'S FUTURE.

6. WHILE IT WAS LESS THAN A GREAT DEBATE, IT COULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE ELECTION OUTCOME. AN IFOP POLL TAKEN IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING CONCLUDED THAT THE DEBATE CHANGED THE OPINIONS OF 10 PERCENT OF THE VIEWERS ABOUT THE CANDIDATES. EVEN ALLOWING FOR AN EXTRA LARGE MARGIN OF ERROR, THIS SUGGESTS THAT THE DEBATE

MAY HAVE SWAYED A SIZEABLE NUMBER OF UNDECIDED OR
HESITANT VOTERS.

7. MITTERRAND STRATEGY. MITTERRAND IS FIGHTING TO GAIN
THE ADDITIONAL 6.8 PERCENT OF THE VOTES HE NEEDS TO WIN.
HIS STRATEGISTS HAVE TOLD US THEY ARE BASING THEIR HOPES
ON HIS KEEPING HIS FIRST-ROUND VOTES AND PICKING UP
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ROUGHLY 90 PERCENT OF THE COMBINED EXTREME LEFT
(LAGUILLER, KRIVINE) AND DUMONT VOTES (4.01 PERCENT
NATIONALLY), 15 PERCENT OF CHABAN'S VOTE (15.1) AND 25
PERCENT OF ROYER'S VOTE (3.17). THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT
ON THE FIRST ROUND MITTERRAND DID NOT DELIVER ALL THE
S SOCIALIST PARTY VOTES AND ARE ENGAGING IN A
DOORBELL-RINGING EXERCISE TO CORRECT THIS. AN IFOP
EXPERT DOUBTS THAT MITTERRAND WILL PICK UP NEARLY ALL OF
THE FAR LEFT/DUMONT VOTES AND POINTS OUT THAT THE
HEAVILY FEMINIST LAGUILLER VOTE (2.33 PERCENT NATIONALLY)
IS NOT TRANSFERABLE AS A BLOC TO MITTERRAND.

8. CHABAN VOTERS: THE KEY? THE GAULLIST PARTY (UDR) AS
EXPECTED CAME OUT FOR GISCARD THE DAY AFTER THE FIRST
ROUND, WITHOUT ENTHUSIASM -- FORCED BY WHAT THEY JUDGED
TO BE THE LEFT THREAT AND WITH THE OBVIOUS DESIRE TO
MAXIMIZE THEIR INFLUENCE IN A GISCARD GOVERNMENT.
CHABAN, AFTER AN EARLIER STATEMENT LIMITED TO OPPOSING
MITTERRAND, GRUDGINGLY ENDORSED GISCARD BY NAME ON MAY
13. OLD-GUARD GAULLIST SANGUINETTI IN SUPPORTING GIS-
CARD MADE CLEAR IT WAS AN UNHAPPY DECISION. FORMER UDR
SECRETARY GENERAL PEYREFITTE, NOW MINISTER OF CULTURE,
HAS SPOKEN OF "SUPPORT WITHOUT PARTICIPATION" IN GIS-
CARD'S CAMPAIGN. FOREIGN MINISTER JOBERT ALSO SUPPORTED
GISCARD IN LUKEWARM FASHION. THE GAULLIST YOUTH MOVE-
MENT (UJP) HAS RESISTED PRESSURE FROM THE UDR LEADERSHIP
AND RECOMMENDED THAT ITS SUPPORTERS ABSTAIN ON THE SECOND
ROUND. THIS COULD ENCOURAGE OTHERS WHO VOTED FOR CHABAN
ON THE FIRST ROUND TO ABSTAIN. GISCARD HAS CONTINUED TO
RUN HIS OWN CAMPAIGN, AND HAS CAREFULLY AVOIDED LETTING
HIMSELF BE TRAPPED BY THE GAULLIST OLD GUARD. HE HAS
KEPT HIS DISTANCE FROM THE UDR PARTY AND INSTEAD HAS
AIMED HIS SECOND-ROUND CAMPAIGN TO APPEAL TO YOUTH AND
WOMEN. IT IS DIFFICULT TO MEASURE EFFECTIVELY HOW CHA-
BAN'S VOTERS WILL VOTE. THIS COULD DECIDE THE ELECTION.

9. ABSTENTIONS. IFOP PREDICTS THAT SOME 82 - 83 PER-
CENT OF FRENCH VOTERS WILL TURN OUT ON THE SECOND ROUND,
ALMOST AS MANY AS THE 84.2 PERCENT WHO VOTED ON MAY 5.

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SOME ANALYSTS ARE INTERPRETING THIS AS SUGGESTING THAT MOST FORMER CHABAN-DELMAS SUPPORTERS WHO MIGHT HAVE ABSTAINED WILL IN FACT VOTE.

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10. JJSS. AFTER LONG HESITATION, RADICAL PARTY LEADER SERVAN-SCHREIBER ANNOUNCED FOR GISCARD MAY 14, NOTING THAT HE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO PERSUADE MITTERRAND TO SLOW DOWN HIS NATIONALIZATION PROGRAM. WHILE THE DECISION IS BOUND TO HAVE SOME SLIGHT ADVERSE EFFECT ON MITTERRAND, JJSS BY WAITING SO LONG LOST MOST OF WHAT LITTLE LEVERAGE AND INFLUENCE HE HAD. MOST RADICALS HAVE ALREADY DECIDED HOW THEY WILL VOTE, AND A SIZEABLE MINORITY OF THE RADICAL PARTY NATIONAL COMMITTEE HAS PUBLICLY COME OUT FOR MITTERRAND. IN A COMMENT ILLUSTRATING HOW DISCREDITED JJSS HAS BECOME, GAULLIST "BARON" OLIVIER GUICHARD SAID HIS DECISION SIMPLY MEANS ONE MORE VOTE FOR GISCARD.

11. OVERSEAS VOTE. IN A TIGHT ELECTION, THE OVERSEAS VOTE COULD TIP THE BALANCE. REPRESENTING ROUGHLY 2 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, IT HAS NOT BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN ANY OF THE OPINION POLLS. ON THE FIRST ROUND, THE OVERSEAS VOTE WAS VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM THAT IN METROPOLITAN FRANCE, GIVING CHABAN 42 PERCENT, MITTERRAND 39 AND GISCARD 16. GISCARD IS HOPEFUL OF PICKING UP MOST OF CHABAN'S OVERSEAS VOTES. BUT HE IS NOT AS WELL KNOWN IN THESE AREAS, AND IT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT THE OVERSEAS VOTERS WILL BEHAVE IN ANY PREDICTABLE FASHION ON MAY 19. MITTERRAND IS STRONG IN MARTINIQUE AND GUADELOUPE, AND HAS COME OUT WITH A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE POSITION RE THEIR EVENTUAL INDEPENDENCE THAN HAS GISCARD. (SEE REFTTEL FOR A DISCUSSION OF OVERSEAS VOTING).

12. POLLS. SOFRES POLL MAY 16 AND IFOP POLL MAY 15 BOTH GAVE EACH CANDIDATE 50 PERCENT, WITH 12 AND 13 PERCENT RESPECTIVELY UNDECIDED. IFOP MAY 11 ALSO GAVE EACH 50 PERCENT. WE HAVE HEARD THAT LATEST MINISTRY OF INTERIOR PRIVATE POLL SHOWS MITTERRAND VERY SLIGHTLY AHEAD (REPORTEDLY 50.14 PERCENT). MAY 9 IFOP POLL HAD GISCARD 51, MITTERRAND 49 WHILE MAY 13 SOFRES POLL HAD GISCARD 51.5 AND MITTERRAND 48.5. FINAL POLLS WILL APPEAR ON ELECTION EVE, MAY 18. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME, ELECTION IS LIKELY TO BE SO CLOSE THAT WINNER ON MAY 20 WILL FACE DIFFICULT TASK OF TRYING TO UNIFY A SHARPLY DIVIDED FRANCE.

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